

Toxic Masculinity: An Exploration of the Root Causes of Sexual Assaults on College
Campuses

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

As every young American, who is about to start university, knows that is it an exciting but nerve-racking time. Every college student should be focused on getting good grades and making friends. No young person should have to worry about being sexually assaulted in college.

The fact of the matter is that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 16 men will be sexually assaulted during their college careers. More than 90% of those sexual assaults will go unreported because there is a lack of awareness and understanding about sexual assault in American culture.

This research looks at the root causes of sexual assault that our society needs to address. Perpetrators of sexual assault are completely responsible for their actions, but education could help prevent sexual assault in the future. Things to be addressed that contribute to the lack of education about sexual assault are lack of sex education in the United States, toxic masculinity, media that contributes to rape culture, and party culture due to the United States' drinking age. All of these things play a part in the high rates of sexual assaults on college campuses across the country.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of my wonderful friends, colleagues, and family members who have inspired me to complete my undergraduate degree. It has been a long process discovering myself and who I want to be, but Ball State has helped me grow so much. I never imagined myself in Muncie, Indiana but the experiences that I have received from living here for the last four years having truly changed me for the better.

I would be nowhere without my wonderful parents who have supported me through my experiences in college, despite driving them crazy by changing my major so many times. Thank you Mama and Papa Cherry for supporting me emotionally and financially during these past four years. I have loved growing together as I become my own person and being able to share my experiences with both of you.

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Thank you to my two best friends from high school, Leigh Dunewood and Michaela Slevin. Although we do not get to see each other very often, every time we do it is as if nothing has changed since high school. Being hundreds of miles apart has not stopped us from being there for each other and words cannot express how lucky I am to have the two of them in my life. I am so excited to watch both of them grow as they take on graduate school in the fall, Leigh at the University of Maryland and Michaela at the University of Cincinnati.

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Process Analysis Statement

At the end of my junior year I panicked. My friends were starting to have their thesis appointment meetings to prepare for their senior theses and I was nowhere near even picking a topic. Reluctantly, I made my appointment with the honors college, so I could check it off of my degree works, even though I was not prepared. I heard that other honors students went into their thesis meetings with vague ideas of what they wanted to do, so I figured it would help me sort out my ideas if I could bounce them off of someone. I went into my meeting with the idea to talk about sexual assault on college campuses. I am majoring in Business and French, so sexual assault on college campuses doesn't really have anything to do with my majors.

Nevertheless, I wanted to write my thesis about sexual assault on college campuses, because I do not believe that there is enough awareness on college campuses about the issue. I am very passionate about the prevention of sexual assault and education of college aged students regarding things like sexual health, consent, bystander intervention, and healthy relationships. I became passionate about these issues my sophomore year when I went through the Greek Peer Advocate training, which is a seven week long training that discusses these issues in Greek life and how to educate Greek members about them and prevent them. After completing the training, I knew that I wanted to do everything that I could to help with it. I have been involved in Greek Peer Advocates for the last five semesters and, since completing the training, I have also gone through the Peer Victim Advocate training through the Office of Victim Services. Although these trainings are similar,

Greek Peer Advocates focuses primarily on prevention and education in chapters while Peer Victim Advocates focuses on the aftermath of sexual assault.

The Peer Victim Advocate training was a 10-week long training to become a first responder at Ball Memorial hospital for students who go to the hospital to get sexual assault examination kits. Both of these trainings have been truly eye opening, to see the lack of knowledge that college students have on these issues. After researching, I discovered that a lot of different things play a role in this ignorance. In the United States, we are lacking sex education that a lot of other industrialized nations have. We have a higher drinking age than most countries in the world, which could play a part in sexual assaults committed when intoxicated. United States culture has also been criticized for being a “rape culture” that encourages sexual assault based on our media. Since learning about all of these things, I’ve continued to look for other educational outlets to better my understanding of sexual assault and what I can do to stop it. Currently, I am working on a 50-hour self-training program online through the Office for Victims of Crime to learn about the different types of crimes and how to be a victim advocate.

So, I went in for my meeting and it went poorly to say the least. I was encouraged to do a thesis related to my majors, but I did not want to. I was already looking toward my future and what I wanted to accomplish and not my past. I was told that what I wanted to talk about wasn’t academic enough for a thesis. I left the meeting feeling distressed and emotional. On my way out of the honors house, I ran into Jason Powell who told me that he could work with me on my thesis after the summer.

I left for the summer and came back in the fall, still without any progress. Jason Powell reached out to me during the semester to inform me that he was creating a class for Honors 499 and that if I still had not decided what to do for my thesis that I should apply for the class. I got into the course and I am so thankful that I did. I bounced some ideas off of Powell and the class which gave me the courage to have my second thesis appointment at the beginning of the spring semester. This time, I went in with the idea that I would research statistics on sexual assault at Ball State and other universities and compare them. I wanted to make a proposal for Ball State based on what other universities do to prevent sexual assault and look into why sexual assault is committed in the first place.

I had an amazing meeting that gave me some incredible ideas to work with. Dr. Lang agreed that I needed to do more research for my thesis instead of focusing on a proposal for my main work. After telling her that I wanted to look into toxic masculinity as part of the reason that sexual assault is committed, she asked me to explain what toxic masculinity is compared to masculinity. After hearing the definition, she was intrigued and asked me if I had thought about writing my entire thesis about toxic masculinity. I had not, but a light bulb went off above my head and I discovered what I was going to write my thesis about.

The overarching topic that I chose was to define toxic masculinity and prove how it contributed to sexual assaults on college campuses. In addition to toxic masculinity, I discuss sex education in the United States, rape culture, media, drinking culture in the United States and Greek life (because women in Greek life

are more likely to be sexually assaulted, and men in Greek life are more likely to sexually assault than other groups in college).

To complete this research, I read a lot of articles online regarding these topics, watched a few documentaries and looked at others' research on these topics. It was pretty easy to find what I was looking for and more. I thoroughly enjoyed doing research for my thesis and, for sure pleasure and education, I read well past what I needed to talk about. I even spent a couple of weekend evenings watching documentaries regarding my thesis, instead of going out with friends, and I loved every second of it. I'm so glad that I picked the topic that I did, because I have friends who picked topics that they did not enjoy and it made writing their theses miserable.

I did find challenges in keeping to the schedule that I made for myself at the beginning of the semester. I expected to do a little research every week, but instead I took a few different occasions throughout the semester where I sat down and researched for 2-5 hours at a time. It worked better for my schedule, and me, this way. It was difficult to prioritize research when I had tests or projects that were due sooner than the thesis was. In hindsight, I definitely should have done more research at the beginning of the semester, but it all came together in the end. I think that being in the thesis class helped greatly. There was a sense of accountability that came with having an actual class instead of doing an independent study. We had due dates that held me accountable for working on the thesis throughout the semester and it really motivated me to stay on top of my research. Had I not had this

accountability, I'm not sure how researching my thesis would have gone, because in the past I have procrastinated writing papers.

I hope in the future the honors college will consider having the thesis class like this one once or twice a year. I know a lot of friends and acquaintances that said taking a class would have been beneficial, so I believe that the need is there. I know some students can do independent research, but I think that having the class in the future would benefit students who are not as good at independent research or who need help finalizing an idea for their thesis. Additionally, this class was very beneficial for the students in it to bounce ideas off of each other since we were all different majors and had different life experiences. I don't think that a lot of people get this when they write their thesis. Overall, the thesis class was very beneficial to me.

At the core of a thesis, it is just a long research paper. For me, writing a thesis was a way to end my college career by evaluating what really mattered to me after my experiences in college. It was difficult to commit to a topic and work on it for an entire semester, so I wanted to be sure that I picked a topic that mattered. If I could go back, I would pick the same topic again, except I wish I had figured my topic out sooner! The honors thesis is very overwhelming and looming, but the best way to work on it is by taking it one day at a time. It is impossible to write everything at once, but it is easy to write multiple 2-3 page papers about a topic until you reach the end. I really was not looking forward to writing my honors thesis, but I am so glad that I had the opportunity to research something that mattered to me so dearly.

Toxic Masculinity: An Exploration of the Root Causes of Sexual Assaults on College Campuses

With recent popularity in the media regarding the It's On Us campaign, #MeToo, and reforms on Title IX, it is a pivotal time in the United States' history to address toxic masculinity and sexual violence. Toxic masculinity is the consequence of western society raising young men and women differently. The phrase explains gender norms that our society has created and the effects of following or not following those norms. As a result of toxic masculinity, violence is prevalent among young men in western society, including sexual violence. I believe that high statistics of sexual assaults occur in college-aged groups due to toxic masculinity. I am going to show this by defining toxic masculinity, identifying double standards in gender norms, and researching sex education in the United States.

It is important to know what gender is before discussing gender norms. Sex and gender are defined differently because sex is the anatomy of an individual's reproductive system that they were born with, whereas gender refers to either societal roles based on the sex of a person or someone's personal identification of one's own gender. Since an individual's assigned sex and gender do not always align, it is important to note that a person can be transgender, or if individuals have biological sex characteristics of both sexes then they are biologically intersex (McDermott 89). Sometimes sex and gender can be used interchangeably, but in this paper I will refer to sex as biological and gender as societal.

Gender refers to the socially constructed role that encompasses everything from attitudes to behaviors that are deemed acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for people based on their sex. For example, historically there has been an unspoken gender role that says that men are the breadwinners in a household, should be strong, and show little emotions and that women are more nurturing, the homemakers, and kind. Additionally, men are more likely to play aggressive sports like football or hockey and women are more likely to play less aggressive sports like dance or yoga. When it comes to education, fewer men go into family and consumer sciences or teaching and fewer women go into math and technology fields. The gender role differences that our society has given us are evident in every aspect of our lives, but they are an important part of human identity (McDermott 89).

A study called the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) was published in 1974 to measure gender roles and the expression of femininity and masculinity in American society. Sandra Bem created the BSRI with the goal of assessing how people identify themselves psychologically and to show the disadvantages of sex-typed categorization versus the advantages of a shared feminine and masculine personality. Sex-typed categorization refers to the internalizing of society's sex-typed standards of desirable behavior for men and women (Twenge 556).

The test has 60 different personality traits, 20 feminine, 20 masculine, and 20 'filler traits' thought to be gender neutral. Participants consisted of 444 males and 279 females in a 1973 sample, and 476 males and 340 females in a 1978 sample. Participants were asked to rate themselves on a 7-point Likert scale, which is a "popular psychometric scoring scheme for attempting to quantify people's opinions

on different issues” that includes responses like “Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree” (Phillips). It is the most commonly used approach for responses in survey research and is aimed to have balanced options to the left and right of “neutral”. If the response choice on either side is unbalanced, then there is a possibility of diminished accuracy for the item being tested (Phillips). The masculine traits consisted of attributes like independent, acts as a leader, and assertive, while the feminine attributes consisted of things like gentle, loyal, loves children, and affectionate. The neutral attributes consisted of characteristics like happy, adaptable, and jealous. The masculine and feminine attributes were derived from a pool of 200 attributes that were judged by male and female undergraduate students at Stanford University, as to what they perceived as more desirable in American society for one sex than for the other. All attributes were considered positively valued for each sex role. The ‘neutral’ attributes were selected from a different pool of 200 personality characteristics that were judged to be neutral and not leaning more toward one sex than another (Twenge 557). The results of this inventory are shown below.

Table 1
Pattern and Structure Coefficients, Communalities,
Means, and Standard Deviations for 20 Traits

Trait	Factor 1: Femininity	Factor 2: Personal Masculinity	Factor 3: Social Masculinity	h^2	M	SD
	P (S)	P (S)	P (S)			
Affectionate	.81 (.78)	-.03 (.20)	.09 (-.07)	.62	5.63	1.09
Warm	.79 (.79)	.01 (.18)	-.01 (-.15)	.62	5.61	1.07
Compassionate	.78 (.79)	-.05 (.24)	.02 (-.09)	.63	5.60	1.11
Gentle	.78 (.77)	-.10 (.05)	-.04 (-.23)	.61	5.29	1.20
Tender	.77 (.75)	-.07 (.10)	.00 (-.17)	.57	5.08	1.25
Sympathetic	.75 (.73)	-.06 (.10)	.00 (-.16)	.54	5.51	1.12
Sensitive to needs of others	.74 (.74)	.01 (.19)	.04 (-.09)	.54	5.63	1.05
Soothe hurt feelings	.71 (.70)	-.02 (.14)	.01 (-.13)	.49	5.50	1.17
Understanding	.68 (.72)	.13 (.27)	-.03 (-.09)	.53	5.87	0.84
Loves children	.33 (.38)	.13 (.14)	-.12 (-.11)	.16	5.98	1.32
Willing to take a stand	.02 (.20)	.80 (.79)	-.02 (.38)	.63	5.70	1.09
Defends own beliefs	-.09 (.10)	.78 (.72)	-.09 (.33)	.53	5.91	1.00
Independent	.05 (.16)	.54 (.57)	.04 (.31)	.33	5.83	1.05
Has leadership abilities	.07 (.17)	.52 (.59)	.10 (.35)	.35	5.94	1.07
Strong personality	-.01 (.05)	.48 (.62)	.29 (.53)	.45	5.72	1.18
Forceful	.02 (-.14)	-.06 (.34)	.79 (.76)	.58	3.69	1.67
Dominant	-.07 (-.19)	.04 (.40)	.72 (.76)	.58	4.38	1.62
Aggressive	-.05 (-.13)	.08 (.37)	.59 (.64)	.41	4.21	1.70
Assertive	.02 (.02)	.35 (.57)	.43 (.61)	.46	4.97	1.22
Willing to take risks	.07 (.10)	.30 (.43)	.22 (.36)	.22	5.22	1.20
Eigenvalues	5.91	4.20	1.17			
% of variance after rotation	27.18	17.08	14.95			

Note: P = pattern coefficients; S = structure coefficients; h^2 = communalities. Pattern coefficients greater than .40 are in bold; these are used for interpretation of the factors.

The bolded numbers show the highest-ranking traits in each category. The traits that were the highest scoring for femininity were affectionate, warm, compassionate, gentle, tender, sympathetic, sensitive to needs of others, soothe hurt feelings and understanding. Masculinity was broken into two categories: personal and social. This was done to distinguish between personal and social characteristics that are given, or are expected, by society. The personal masculine traits included willingness to take a stand, defends own beliefs, independent, has leadership

abilities, and strong personality, whereas social masculine traits ranked higher on forceful, dominant, aggressive, and assertive. Findings from this study show that people are aware of the gendered differences in gender norms based on the high percentage of men who identified with masculine traits and the high percentage of women who identified with feminine traits. (Twenge 563).

Although this study has been found empirically sound, it has been criticized for its reliability, because it is a self-reporting inventory that relies on the accuracy of how participants rate themselves. Construct validity of scores from the BSRI are still debated, because “femininity and masculinity remain inadequately and inconsistently defined in Bem’s discussions” (Hoffman 4). Additionally, the study could have a significant lack of consistency if given to groups of extremes. For example, the results would be skewed if given to a group of army men, who would potentially exhibit higher masculine traits, or a group of parochial high school girls, that would potentially exhibit higher feminine traits than the average population. Although these results are sometimes criticized, they were extremely groundbreaking in the seventies to introduce to a binary society that gender roles and gender polarization existed. This created a discussion how it is unfair to assume one’s gender roles based on their sex, because some people do not identify in this binary.

Some individuals identify as being genderqueer, or non-binary. This refers to gender identities of “a person whose gender identity cannot be categorized as solely male or female” (Merriam Webster, Genderqueer). These terms are used to describe identities outside of the gender binary of masculine or feminine in western culture.

Genderqueer people can identify as a combination of masculine and feminine or they can identify as neither, which is called agender. A person who is agender may also refer to themselves as nongendered, genderless, genderfree, or androgynous (Merriam-Webster Agender). If a person identifies as genderfluid, they are “a person whose gender identity is not fixed”, rather than committing to a single one (Merriam-Webster Genderfluid).

Now that we have looked at the differences in feminine and masculine traits, it is important to look at the difference between masculinity and toxic masculinity. When someone reads the term toxic masculinity for the first time, they might think of extremes like gangs, the mafia, or prisons; ultimately, toxic masculinity is first thought of as aggressive men that are to be feared in society. This is not wrong, but toxic masculinity goes much deeper than that. Toxic masculinity is “the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence” (Terry A Kupers 714). Ultimately, toxic masculinity can be defined as masculine traits that are extreme. An easy example to look at first is prisons.

In prison, toxic masculinity is at its most exaggerated form, so it is easy to identify. It can be seen in “fights on the prison yard, assaults on officers, the ugly phenomenon of prison rape, and other hypercompetitive and violent, interactions” (Terry A Kupers 714). As a result of such strong, prevalent masculine surroundings toxic masculinity festers and violence is more likely.

This highly masculine environment does not come out of nowhere, however. It is instilled in men at a young age and culminates over time. Toxic masculinity

shapes the socialization and aspirations of young males by telling them that they must be masculine or else they are wrong. Today, young males in the United States are subject to “ruthless competition, an inability to express emotions other than anger, an unwillingness to admit weakness or dependency, and a devaluation of feminine attributes in men that lead to things like homophobia” (Terry A Kupers 716). All of these things contribute to being classically masculine.

There are types of masculinities that society presents as alternatives to the classic masculine ideal; for example, gay and transgender men, introspective men, artistic men and so forth. These alternatives include most men who are not overtly masculine. Although these alternatives exist, they are often denigrated for being “feminine” or “gay,” since classic femininity is considered lesser than masculinity in western society. This negative connotation is seen in our everyday language when phrases are used like “you throw like a girl,” “don’t cry like a little bitch,” “man up,” “be a man,” “no homo,” “that’s gay,” “don’t be a pussy,” “nice guys finish last,” and “you need to grow some balls.” These phrases devalue feminine traits while justifying the lack of positive spaces for masculine emotions. Phrases like these encourage men to not be their authentic selves for fear of being shamed or ostracized. There is a lot pain, loneliness, and suffering for someone who is not allowed to be their authentic self, which ties in to the toxicity of masculinity, as well as the aggressive behaviors that are more discussed, like fights, aggression, and abuse. These feelings can lead to men trying to prove their masculinity, which ultimately can be toxic.

Terry A. Kupers states “the man who feels he cannot get respect in any other way is the one who feels a strong urge to dominate others.” This urge has been described in Mexican culture as machismo, which can be defined as “exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male interpersonal relationships and arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relationships” (Socolow 3). It is considered an extreme gender schema that is associated with aggression, delinquent or criminal behavior, and negative alcohol or drug related behavior. These behaviors are linked to negative mental health and predicated higher rates of depression, neuroticism, and psychoticism in men (Lara 12). According to Mosher and colleagues, although starting as a Hispanic phenomenon, machismo ideals have spread to the United States and contain three components: “callous sexuality toward women, a perception of violence is manly, and the view that danger is exciting” (Mosher and Sirkin 227). Ultimately, these toxic masculine ideas create six problematic behavioral patterns: restrictive emotionality, homophobia, socialized control and power, restrictive sexual and affectionate behavior, obsession with achievement and success and healthcare problems like stress and unhealthy coping mechanisms (O’Neil, Helms, Gable, Wrightsman 336).

So what is the correlation between sexual violence and toxic masculinity? Jeremy Posadas teaches a course at Austin College called “Sex, Self, and Society” offered to students at the undergraduate level who are willing to explore the ways that sex and religion relate to each other and to society in the United States. He claims “sexual violence in the West is fundamentally a problem of masculinity.” He delves into the idea that rape culture is the mechanism that channels toxic

masculinity into socially acceptable practices like sexual violence. He calls our society to not only eradicate sexual violence, but to consider the root causes of the problem that subject young boys to become toxic masculine men (Posadas 177-178). As universities across the country witness an epidemic of sexual violence on campus, it has become clear that society has an obligation to address this reality, to raise awareness about the crisis, and to work to address its causes. Rape culture, “the insidious and ubiquitous set of constructs that shapes gendered self-concepts and expectations about sexual assault,” (Lawrence 167) must be analyzed as part of this solution.

According to the WAVAW Rape Crisis Centre, rape culture was a term coined by feminists in the 1970s to show the ways in which society has normalized male sexual violence. Rape culture is a complex set of beliefs that encourage male sexual aggression, and supports violence by making it seem normalized or even ‘sexy.’ Rape culture is seen in TV, popular music and literature, jokes, advertisements, films, social media and even laws. Ever heard the phrase “sex sells”? It may sell, but it also contributes to rape culture and the objectification of women. The same tactics have been used time and time again: a women wearing little to no clothing to sell everything from deodorant, alcoholic beverages, sales at Macy’s, and more—“the examples are too numerous to list” (Lawrence 167).

Here are some examples of rape culture in our media.



IT JUST TASTES BETTER

BURGER KING

IT'LL BLOW YOUR MIND AWAY

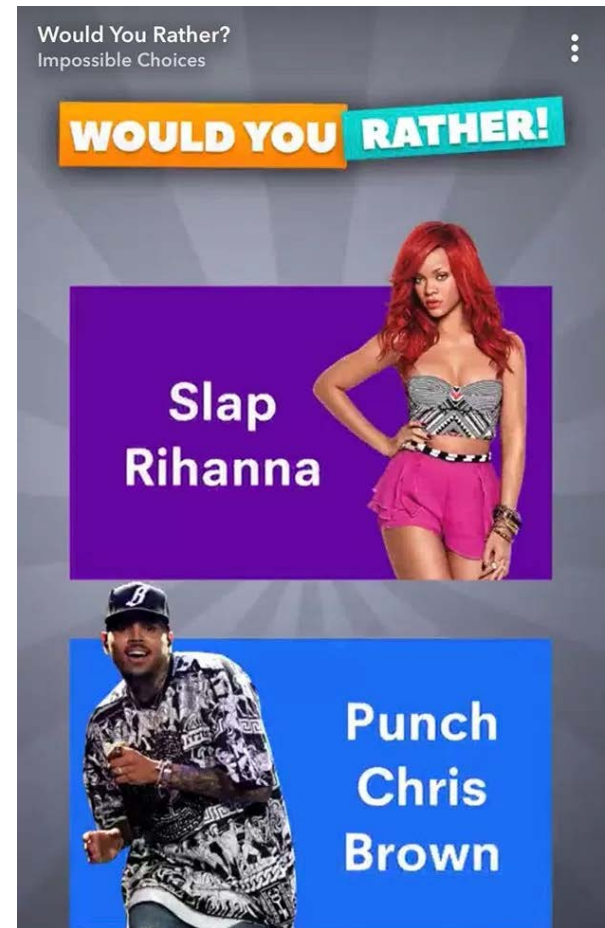
BK SUPER SEVEN INCHER

\$6.25 MEAL

Fill your desire for something long, juicy and flame-grilled with the NEW BK SUPER SEVEN INCHER. Yearn for more after you taste the mind-blowing burger that comes with a single beef patty, topped with American cheese, crispy onions and the A.1.® Thick & Hearty Steak Sauce.

All our products are prepared in 100% vegetable oil. TM & © 2006, 2008 Burger King Corporation. All rights reserved. Available to limited time only. Offer subject to change without prior notice. While stocks last. Taxes and credits apply. Please check with the Restaurant for details only. Menu items at selected locations. Not available at all locations. Terms & Conditions. © 2007 The Coca-Cola Company. "Coca-Cola", the Dynamic Ribbon Device and the Modified Dynamic Ribbon are trademarks of The Coca-Cola Company.





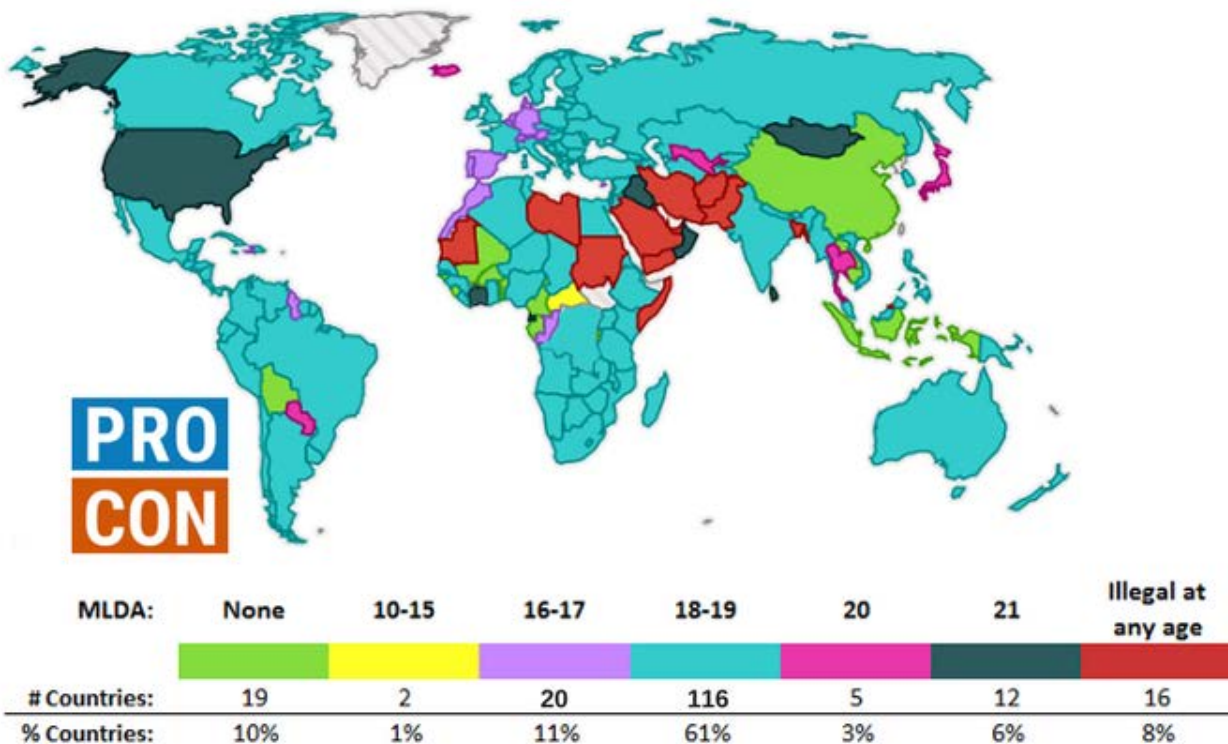
The women in these ads are all slim and attractive bombshells. No matter what they are selling, the advertisements in which they are featured show them wearing little clothing, gaining sexual pleasure from buying clothes or eating food, and advocating sexual innuendos like “now open” and “it’ll blow your mind.” These words and images make violence against women and sexual coercion seem so normal that society thinks that rape culture is inevitable. These images show that women can be objectified and sexualized for the means of anything; after a while, those messages are internalized. Many people think that rape culture and sexual violence are just the way it is and that to prevent it, women must change their own actions like the way they dress, who they hang out with, and how much they drink to prevent violence. But why is it a victim’s job to prevent a crime when we should not be blaming them, but rather their attacker? It is because we live in a society that teaches the idea of do not get raped, instead of do not rape.

People may argue that sexual violence is not still a problem and that these advertisements are outdated. Recent statistics show that sexual violence is an undeniable social reality with one in four women experiencing sexual violence at some point in their life, with the perpetrators mostly being intimate partners or friends. With up to one third of adolescent girls reporting to have had a forced sexual encounter, the problem of sexual violence deserves serious discussion. Recent events on college campuses reflect this reality in institutions of higher learning, especially because the most affected group of sexual violence is women between the ages of 18-25 years old (Mary A. Nyangweso 180) and more than 90% of sexual assault victims, on college campuses, do not report their assault (National

Sexual Violence Resource Center) because of the lack of education and awareness there is on college campuses. Red zone education should be taught at every university during the first few weeks of the fall semester. The red zone is “a period of time early in one’s first year at college or university during which women are at a particularly high risk for unwanted sexual experiences” (Kimble 331). Usually, this occurs between the first 6-8 weeks of classes when the weather is nice so partying and drinking are readily available (including football tailgates), new students may drink for the first time in their lives, new members of Greek life are recruited, and most people have to make a new group of friends that may not be reliable in questionable situations.

Alcohol is not the cause of sexual assaults, but it has been proven to have a positive correlation with sexual assaults. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism claims that “50% of sexual assault cases involve alcohol consumption by the perpetrator, victim, or both.” Additionally, the high minimum drinking age in the United States can contribute to stigma around drinking, stereotypes about women drinking, the effect that alcohol has on cognitive and motor ability skills, and the exacerbating of existing risk factors. Perhaps, the drinking age should be lowered to 18, so college students can experiment with alcohol before college and know how their bodies react to it. By lowering the drinking age, it would also reduce the stigma that survivors face if they have been underage drinking, which could be a cause of not reporting. According to ProCon.org, the United States and 11 other countries have a minimum legal drinking

age of 21 years old and 16 countries ban alcohol entirely. The other 163 countries shown, have a drinking age lower than 21.



Why is it amongst other industrialized countries that the United States has such a high minimum drinking age? Countries, like Germany, take an entirely different approach to drinking. The minimum legal drinking age for beer and wine is 16 years old and for hard liquor is 18. Additionally, German citizens cannot get their driver's license until they are 18, to reduce automobile accidents related to driving while intoxicated. Such a low drinking age can have debatable health concerns, but students are able to ease their way into drinking, by starting with lower alcohol

content drinks, and they are able to learn what their body can handle before attending a university. If the drinking age were lower, or there was better alcohol education, it could reduce the rates of sexual assaults committed when alcohol is involved and reduce the stigma surrounding underage drinking. This is just one form of education that the United States could do.

Another facet of education that is lacking in the United States is sex education. The United States ranks first among developed nations in rates of both teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (Hall 2011). Many state governments have turned to “abstinence only” sexual education programs to try to lower these statistics. There is a lot of debate as to whether or not abstinence only programs work, or if these programs contribute to higher rates of teen pregnancy. According to research by Katherine F Stanger- Hall and David W. Hall in 2011, they found that abstinence education is positively correlated with teenage pregnancy and birth rates and, therefore, abstinence only programming does not work in reducing teenage pregnancy. Data is listed below to show pregnancy rates in select developed countries between 2002 and 2005 and birth rates in 2006.

International Data	U.S.	France	Germany	Netherlands	Canada	UK
Pregnancy rate (2002–5)	72.2	25.7	18.8	11.8	29.2	41.3 [^]
Birth rate (2006)	41.9	7.8	10.1	3.8	13.3	26.7

Rates are listed as numbers per 1000 girls 15–19 years old,

[^]15–18 years old [1–4].

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Based on this data, pregnancy and birth rates are significantly higher in the United States compared to the other industrialized countries listed. Is this a country problem or are there certain states that are worse off than others? Below is a chart that lists every state, with ratings for each state on a scale of 0-3. Many of these states do not require any education. A level 3 indicates the highest emphasis on “abstinence only” programs, where waiting to have sex until marriage is the fundamental teaching. A level 2 promotes abstinence in teenagers, if sex education is taught, but contraception is not prohibited like level 3. Level 1 covers abstinence for school-aged teens as part of a comprehensive sex or HIV/STD education curriculum, which should include medically accurate information on contraception and protection from HIV/STDs. Level 0 laws promotes sex education and/or HIV education but does not specifically mention abstinence (Hall 2011).

State	Law: Abstinence¹	Law Level²	Laws & Policy Level³
Alabama	Yes	3	3
Alaska	-	-	1
Arizona	Yes	2	3
Arkansas	Yes	2	3
California	Yes	1	1
Colorado	Yes	2	2
Connecticut	No	0	0
Delaware	-	-	3
Florida	Yes	3	3
Georgia	Yes	2	2
Hawaii	-	-	3
Idaho	No	0	0
Illinois	Yes	3	3
Indiana	Yes	3	3
Iowa	No	0	0
Kansas	-	-	0
Kentucky	-	-	3
Louisiana	Yes	3	3
Maine	Yes	1	1
Maryland	-	-	0
Massachusetts	No	0	1
Michigan	Yes	1	1
Minnesota	Yes	1	1
Mississippi	Yes	3	3
Missouri	Yes	2	2

Montana	-	-	0
Nebraska	-	-	2
Nevada	No	0	0
New Hampshire	No	0	0
New Jersey	Yes	1	1
New Mexico	-	-	3
New York	-	-	1
North Carolina	Yes	3	3
North Dakota	-	-	-
Ohio	Yes	3	3
Oklahoma	Yes	3	3
Oregon	Yes	1	1
Pennsylvania	Yes	2	3
Rhode Island	Yes	2	3
South Carolina	Yes	3	3
South Dakota	Yes	2	2
Tennessee	Yes	3	3
Texas	Yes	3	3
Utah	Yes	3	3
Vermont	Yes	1	1
Virginia	Yes	2	2
Washington	Yes	2	2
West Virginia	No	0	0
Wisconsin	No	0	1
Wyoming	-	-	-

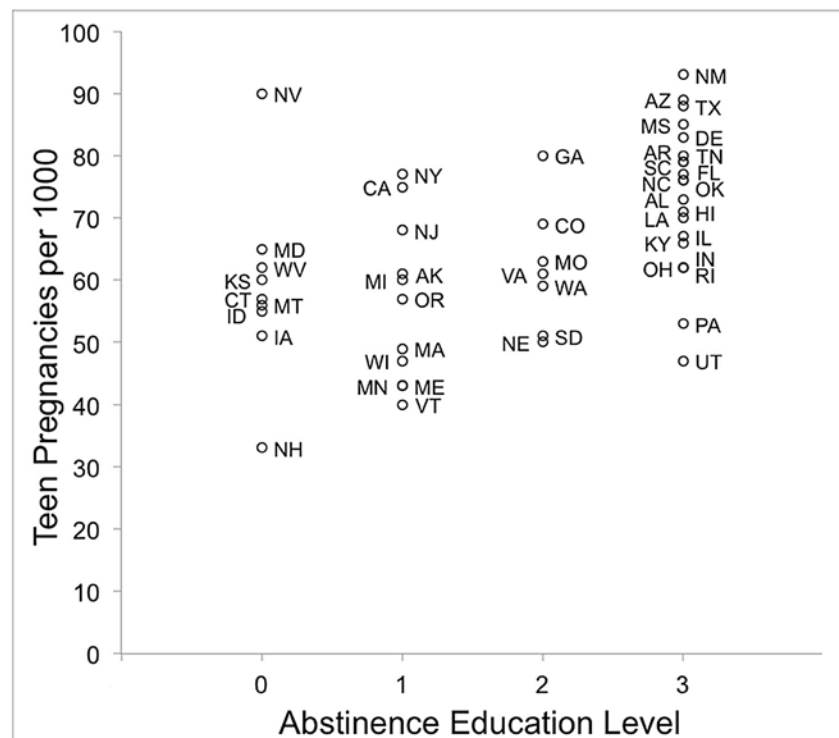
¹State laws with (yes) or without (no) an abstinence provision as of 2007 [16].

²Level of Abstinence provision in state law as of 2007 [17].

³Level of Abstinence provision in state law or other policy as of 2005 [19]; differences to laws² are noted in *italics*.

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Based on the information above, very few states lack abstinence only education programs in the United States. Outdated government programs, like the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA), promote an “abstinence only” initiative that was created during the Reagan administration. It was utilized for 17 years, despite the lack of data to support it. In 1981, the AFLA was enacted as Title XX of the Public Health Service Act, to be administered by the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention of the Department of Health and Human Services. AFLA’s goal was to prevent premarital pregnancy by establishing self-discipline and family centered programs to promote chastity. Listed below is the data from Katherine F Stanger-Hall and David W. Hall. It looks at whether or not all of the states have consistent statistics of teen pregnancies, or if different sex education policies, since AFLA, play a different role as to which states have higher teen pregnancies. States that have abstinence education levels rated at a 2 or 3, have higher rates of teen pregnancies than programs that have levels rated at a 0 or 1.



As a result of the researched mentioned above, there should be an increase in comprehensive sex education and sexually transmitted infection education into the health or biology courses that middle school and high school students are required to take. In addition, curriculum should cover planning for the future, safe coping mechanisms and proper mental health education in middle school, high school and college home economics, physical education, and psychology courses. Although some people believe that safe sex education sends a mixed signal to students and promotes sexual activity, it actually promotes safe sex and condom use that can prevent STIs and pregnancy. Without a change in government policy and stigma surrounding sex education, nothing will change, however.

According to Rebekah Saul, AFLA is to blame for people having a “contraceptive mentality.” She describes this mentality as citizens believing that the federal government provides too much funding to organizations like Planned Parenthood and should be providing that money to organizations that support adoption services and prevention education. She states that the prevention education services utilize “scare tactics to promote abstinence and often distort[s] information relating to the effectiveness of contraceptive and disease prevention methods” (Saul, Volume 1, Issue 2). If AFLA, and other similar programs, had not been enacted, perhaps our sex education would be more up to date with other countries and the stigma surrounding sex education would not be so evident.

Since AFLA was removed, other programs like the “It’s On Us” campaign have been enacted in its place. The “It’s On Us” campaign was launched in September 2014 by the Obama administration and it asks people to join a national movement to end sexual

assault by “taking the pledge [to] commit to helping create a culture of consent, bystander intervention and survivor support” (It’s On Us Campaign). The campaign provides tools for college campuses to educate students about sexual assault and different components that have a part in it. Because college students are at the highest risk of being sexually assaulted, the campaign focuses on educating them. Vice president under the Obama administration, Joe Biden, still travels the country discussing the campaign and what students can do. He speaks on topics including sexual assault education, bystander intervention, safe drinking, and the issues in Greek life that can lead to sexual assault.

Biden is not the only person who has signaled out Greek life for issues regarding sexual assault. According to the episode in The Naked Truth documentary titled *Frat Power*, more than 25% of university donors are Greek alumni, 25% of congress members were in Greek life, and almost half of our presidents were in Greek organizations in college. With those kinds of numbers, Greek alumni can have a lot of say as to whether or not organizations stay on campus and how much trouble they can get in to. Not only do political figures have personal ties to Greek life personally, currently in Washington, there is a Fraternity and Sorority Political Action Committee, also known as FSPAC. A Political Action Committee is an organization that raises money privately to influence elections or legislation, especially at the federal level. If 25% of congress members and half of our presidents have been members of Greek life, because of their personal ties to it, they are more likely to be influenced by the ideals of the FSPAC and more likely to protect Greek organizations when they are in the wrong.

The FSPAC official website describes its main objectives, which is to “provide financial aid to the campaigns of federal office candidates (house, senate and president) who support the objectives of fraternity life.” The website does not explain the objectives of fraternity life, however. With FSPAC claiming that 90% of the candidates they have supported have won their elections, the PAC clearly has power in politics. With no explanation as to what fraternal ideas the PAC is trying to protect, it claims “fraternity and sorority leaders have been working together to build a positive presence in Washington that helps protect the fraternal experience,” without defining the fraternity experience. Greek life can aid in education and networking, but it is more often known for scandals like sexual assault and hazing. Perhaps the strong fraternal influence in Washington is why only 44 states have anti-hazing laws, not all 50, and only 9 states consider hazing a felony, because Greek members do not want to end tradition. When there is money involved, people watch other people’s backs through the networks and connections that they make.

There has not been a single year in the last two decades where someone has not died from fraternity hazing; even one death is too many (The Naked Truth, Episode 10). What a crazy thought that organizations that are supposed to take good men and women and make them great could just make them dead. Great men and women are not what people think about when they think about Greek life, as it is associated with hazing, drunkards, sexual assault, and blatant racism, which are none of the things their founders imagined. According to The Naked Truth, 133 Greek organizations at 55 colleges in 2015 were shut down, suspended, or

sanctioned for underage drinking, sexual misconduct, hazing deaths, etc. Not one or two Greek organizations were shut down, but 133.

Sororities across the country are not allowed to have alcohol in their Greek homes, because it reduces insurance costs. This plays a huge role in the social scene of Greek life, because the fraternities can have alcohol when the sororities cannot, so if young women want to party they know that they have to go to fraternity homes to do so. The women that go to those parties are generally under the age of 21, because they cannot get alcohol anywhere else. Because of this leverage, fraternities can dictate guest lists, party themes, and activities. Without the input of women, fraternities come up with themes titled 'CEOs and Office Hoes', 'Red Light District', 'ABC' (anything but clothes), etc. If those party themes are not bad enough, below are examples of banners from Fraternity homes in the last few years. Clearly, these institutions perpetuate rape culture and without stricter regulations, it is no wonder that they get away with the things that they do.



Old Dominican University,

2010

Texas Tech University,

2014

West Virginia University,

2015

A fraternity house is the perfect storm of student housing, which is supposed to be safe, and an unsupervised flow of alcohol with no meaningful adult supervision, which is quite unsafe. This feeds into perpetrator's needs of signaling out victims for sexual assault. A perpetrator needs a space, an ability to disable a victim from her surroundings, and then an ability to not be discovered (The Naked Truth Episode 10). With such rampant alcohol and sexism under a single roof, it is no wonder that 27.5% of sexual assaults reported on colleges campuses are committed by fraternity men (The Naked Truth Episode 10), higher than any other group of men in college.

It is incredible how ignorant college campuses choose to be in the matter of sexual assault reporting. In 2016, there were 221 colleges and universities that were under federal investigations for Title IX violations. Specifically, at Kansas State, complainants can only file claims to campus housing, and fraternity housing is considered to be off campus housing. Yet, Sigma Nu fraternity was kicked off of campus for a drinking complaint, despite it being an off campus home (The Naked Truth Episode 10). Instances like this discourage victims from reporting, because universities inadvertently claim that they do not care about sexual assaults, even though under Title IX they have a duty to investigate complaints, whether on campus or not.

Title IX is enforced by the U.S Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. It protects people from discrimination in education based on sex and claims that "no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under

any education program or activity regarding Federal financial assistance” (The Office for Civil Rights). Originally, Title IX was founded to protect women from being discriminated in athletics, but it is now more commonly known for protecting students against sexual harassment, sexual violence, and any other gender based discrimination that could hinder their educational experience. Schools, by law, must “have an impartial and prompt process for investigating and adjudicating reported cases” (EndCampusRape Campaign). Under another federal law that intersects with Title IX, the Clery Act, states colleges and universities are required to notify survivors of counseling resources, options of how to report to their school and law enforcement, provide academic and living accommodations after the incident, and to be notified of the final outcome of any disciplinary proceedings for the accused (EndCampusRape Campaign). Many college campuses have not adhered to these guidelines, resulting in recent investigations. Additionally, these rules do not apply to students K-12, because the Clery Act only covers students in higher education (The Clery Center). Without the knowledge of the Clery Act and Title IX, incoming students at universities are uneducated on sexual assault and how to report it, also contributing to The Red Zone.

Ultimately, I believe that sexual assault is perpetual and that it will happen over and over again on college campuses until something is done to address the many problems in the United States’ education systems and western culture. Additionally, there needs to be tougher repercussions on individuals who commit sexual assault, because if they keep getting away with it, then they are going to keep doing it. Thanks to recent awareness, like the #MeToo campaign, many survivors have stepped forward to create a

“vital conversation about sexual violence” that needs to be heard, but there is always more that can be done. The #MeToo website states that “we want perpetrators to be held accountable and we want strategies implemented to sustain long term, systematic change” (#MeToo Campaign), and I could not have said it better myself. Now is the time to educate yourself, those around you, and your local, state and national governments, because change needs to be made. That is the least that the victims of sexual assault deserve.

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